

In the Claims

1. (Currently amended) A method of managing contacts within a contact centre, comprising the steps of:

assigning to a received contact a priority and a skillset identifier, whereby the received contact can be prioritised relative to other ones of said contacts;

creating a new software object for said received contact;

determining a queuing position for said new software object relative to at least one other software object representing a contact having a skillset identifier similar to said skillset identifier assigned to said received contact;

adding to said new software object a reference pointer to said at least one other software object; and

storing in memory a collection of said software objects each containing said reference pointer to at least one other of said software objects;

whereby said stored collection of said software objects provides a prioritised queue for a skillset.

2. (Currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein said new software object includes reference pointers to two other software objects having said similar skillset identifier, said two other software objects representing the contacts immediately ahead of and behind said contact within a queue, except in the case in which the new software object is positioned at an end of said queue.

3. (Currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising the step of modifying said at least one other software object with a reference pointer to the new software object.

4. (Currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the step of assigning to said received contact said priority and said skillset identifier includes

assigning multiple said skillset identifiers, and the step of adding said referencepointer comprises adding separate referencepointers to software objects in different queues.

5. (Previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising the step of responding to a network request by sending over a network details of those software objects at a head of a queue matching criteria specified in the request.

6. (Currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the software objects are created and maintained by a contact manager, and a queuing module carries out said determination of said queuing position according to information associated with the new software object, the queuing module being further capable of adding said referencepointer to said new software object.

7. (Previously presented) The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the contact manager has a memory space in which said software objects are stored, and the queuing module has a memory space in which said software objects are updated, and said memory spaces either form part of a common space.

8. (Currently amended) A method of distributing contacts across a network of contact centres, wherein each contact is represented by a software object maintained at one of said contact centres, each said software object containing referencepointers to one or more other of said software objects maintained at the same contact centre to provide a queue of software objects at each said contact centre, wherein the method comprises:

upon a network resource having the capability of handling said contacts with certain criteria becoming available, requesting from each said contact centre the highest priority queued software object matching said criteria;

receiving information relating to each such highest priority queued software object from said contact centres;

determining which software object represents the contact with the highest priority and/or best match for the available resource; and

issuing routing instructions to cause said contact to be routed to the resource.

9. (Currently amended) The method as claimed in claim 8, wherein the contact centre which maintained the software object representing the selected contact carries out the further step of removing the selected software object from its queue and updating said software objects which contain said reference pointers to the selected software object, to thereby update the top of one or more of said queues represented at said contact centre by a collection of said software objects.

10. (Currently amended) A method of distributing contacts across a network of contact centres, wherein each contact is represented by a software object maintained at a contact centre, each said software object containing reference pointers to one or more said software objects maintained at the same contact centre to provide a queue of said software objects at each said contact centre, wherein the method comprises:

- maintaining a network queue of contacts by automatically replicating changes in contact software objects at each contact centre with corresponding changes in contact software objects in said network queue;

- upon a network resource having the capability of handling contacts with certain criteria becoming available, determining from the network queue the highest priority queued software object matching said criteria; and

- issuing routing instructions to cause said contact to be routed to the resource.

11. (Currently amended) A computer program product comprising a computer-readable medium storing and/or recording instructions in machine readable form which when executed in a computer system for managing contacts at a contact centre are effective to cause the computer system to:

- assign to a received contact a priority and a skillset identifier, whereby the received contact can be prioritised relative to other contacts;

- create a new software object for said received contact;

- determine a queuing position for said new software object relative to at least one other software object representing a contact having a similar skillset identifier;

add to said new software object a referencepointer to said at least one other software object, and

store in memory a collection of said software objects each containing said referencepointer to at least one other of said software objects;

whereby said stored collection of said software objects provides a prioritised queue for a skillset.

12. (Currently amended) A computer program product arranged to distribute contacts across a network of contact centres, wherein each contact is represented by a software object maintained at one of said contact centres, each said software object containing pointers to one or more other of said software objects maintained at the same contact centre to provide a queue of software objects at each said contact centre, said computer program product comprising a computer-readable medium storing and/or recording instructions in machine readable form which when executed in a computer system provided in a network of contact centres are effective to cause the computer system to :

upon a network resource having the capability of handling contacts with certain criteria becoming available, request from each said contact centre a highest priority queued software object representing a contact queued at said contact centre which matches said criteria;

receive information relating to each of said highest priority queued software objects from said contact centres;

determine which of said software objects represents the contact with the highest priority and/or best match for the available resource; and

issue routing instructions to cause said contact to be routed to the resource.

13. (Currently amended) A computer-implemented system for managing contacts in a contact centre, the system comprising:

a workflow processor for assigning to a received contact a priority and a skillset identifier, whereby the received contact can be prioritised relative to other contacts;

an object creation module for creating a new software object for said contact;

a queuing manager for determining a queuing position for said new software object relative to at least one other software object representing a contact having a skillset identifier similar to said skillset identifier assigned to said received contact;

a software object modification module for adding to said software object a referencepointer to said at least one other software object, and

a memory for storing a collection of said software objects each containing a referencepointer to at least one other software object;

whereby said stored collection of said software objects provides a prioritised queue for a skillset.

14. (Currently amended) A computer-implemented system for distributing contacts across a network of contact centres, wherein each contact is represented by a software object maintained at a contact centre, each said software object containing referencepointers to one or more other of said software objects maintained at the same contact centre to provide a queue of said software objects at each contact centre, wherein the system comprises:

a request generator for generating a request, upon a network resource having the capability of handling said contacts with certain criteria becoming available, said request being effective to determine from each contact centre the highest priority queued software object at said contact centre matching said criteria;

a network connection for forwarding said request to each contact centre and receiving therefrom information concerning the highest priority queued software object at each said contact centre matching said criteria;

comparison means for determining which of said software objects represents the contact with the highest priority and/or best match for the available resource; and

a routing instruction generator for issuing routing instructions to cause said contact to be routed to the resource.

15. (Currently amended) A software object embodied on a computer-readable medium, representing a contact at a contact centre, said software object including: a referencepointer to one or more other of said software objects located immediately

ahead of or behind said software object in a queue, the software object further comprising an identifier to the contact which the software object represents and a skillset identifier enabling the software object to be identified in a search for software objects representing contacts which match given skillset criteria.

16. (Currently amended) A virtual queue of contacts embodied on a computer-readable medium, wherein: each contact within the queue is represented by a software object including a referencepointer to one or more other said software objects located immediately ahead of or behind said software object in a queue, the software object further comprising an identifier to the contact which the software object represents and a skillset identifier enabling the software object to be identified in a search for said software objects representing said contacts which match given skillset criteria, and wherein the order of said contacts within the queue is determinable from the aggregated referencepointers between said software objects.

17. (Previously amended) The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the contact manager has a contact manager memory space, and the queuing module has a queuing module memory space, and wherein each of said software objects is stored in two corresponding copies, a first of said copies being stored in the queuing module memory space and a second of said copies being stored in the contact manager memory space, and wherein a replication service is provided which is configured to ensure that changes to the first of said copies are reflected in corresponding changes to the second of said copies, and that changes to the second of said copies are reflected in corresponding changes to the first of said copies.